



Macedonia

Macedonia is a multiparty parliamentary democracy. The current multi-ethnic coalition Government, led by Prime Minister Vlado Buckovski of the ethnic Macedonian Social Democratic Union of Macedonia, came to power in September 2002 in elections deemed free and fair by international observers. After former President Boris Trajkovski died in an airplane crash in February 2004, then-Prime Minister Branko Crvenkovski was elected president in April in an election generally considered free and fair. A divisive national referendum challenging new municipal-redistricting laws failed due to low voter turnout in November, and local elections on the basis of newly formed, ethnically diverse municipalities are scheduled for March 2005.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens; however, there were problems in some areas. Law enforcement officers occasionally beat

suspects, particularly during initial arrest and detention. In contrast with previous years, arbitrary arrest and prolonged pretrial detention occurred infrequently. The Government showed progress on investigating allegations of human rights abuses. The judiciary, on some occasions, did not effectively investigate or prosecute state agents and civilians for alleged human rights abuses. Implementation of an amnesty law for former 2001 combatants not accused of war crimes was completed by year's end. The Government continued to cooperate with the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) in investigating alleged war crimes cases. Violence and discrimination against women (particularly in the Roma and Albanian communities) remained problems, as did societal discrimination against minorities, including Roma, ethnic Albanians and ethnic Turks. Trafficking in persons (TIP) was a problem that the Government continued to combat aggressively. The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary; however corruption, coercion and political influence at times limited its ability to function efficiently.

United States support for democracy and human rights in Macedonia has played a crucial role in helping the country transition from an unstable, ethnically divided society in the aftermath of the 2001 conflict to an aspiring EU NATO candidate today.

The 2004–2005 U.S. human rights and democracy strategy for Macedonia focused on encouraging the Government to pass the remaining legislation mandated by the Framework Agreement (FWA), the agreement that ended the 2001 conflict), ensure its efficient implementation, and address critical judicial and rule of law shortcomings.

The United States provided significant financial support in fiscal year 2004 to support FWA-mandated decentralization efforts in Macedonia, and led donor coordination efforts. The U.S.-funded Make Decentralization Work program assisted municipalities in developing the capacity to decentralize and increase citizen participation in public decision-making successfully.

The United States actively continued to monitor and encourage all levels of government to implement the FWA. Macedonia's ethnic minorities enjoyed the FWA's positive impact in 2004, when they applied for the first time for dual-language passports, studied at the state-supported, Albanian-language Tetovo University and saw mixed-ethnic police patrols ensuring the safety of Macedonia's streets and borders. Unequivocal U.S. support for the FWA process helped encourage Macedonia's multiethnic coalition Government to overcome a contentious intra-coalition debate and agree on new municipal boundaries in

August. United States recognition of Macedonia's constitutional name and statements by the Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, Defense Secretary, and the U.S. Ambassador underscoring U.S. commitment to the FWA helped reduce support for a national referendum on decentralization that could have reversed progress under the FWA.

The United States supported the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) international observer missions for the unexpected presidential election in April and for the November 7 referendum. United States Embassy staff participated as observers at polling stations throughout the country. In both cases, the presence and actions of the OSCE-led missions helped to ensure free and fair electoral processes and thereby strengthen democracy in Macedonia.

The United States funded a project to assist the Government and political parties in improving communication, strengthening and democratizing internal practices, and encouraging meaningful dialogue between party leadership and constituents. Another U.S.-funded project helped parliament and political parties become more effective and responsive to citizens by recruiting politically- and ethnically-diverse students to serve as research assistants for members of parliament, caucuses and committees. Both projects also focused on increasing political involvement among women, youth and minority groups, including Roma.

With U.S. support, local communities fostered democratic decision-making, inter-ethnic cooperation and management skills as they planned and executed projects addressing urgent needs, including school repairs, water supply system, and other community projects. In the town of Debar, one school that benefited from the program waived fees for 32 Roma students who otherwise could not afford to attend as a show of the community's democratic commitment and project appreciation. The United States provided grants, technical assistance and training to non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focused on conflict management, community development, youth, gender and minority rights, and expanding citizen participation in decision-making at the national and local levels.

The United States frequently and directly engaged in human rights advocacy, often in coordination with other representatives of the international community. The United States and its partners from the international community continued to stress to the Government that Macedonia's NATO and EU aspirations hinge on its ability to respect international human rights and democracy standards and the rule of law, including the obligation to bring human rights abusers to justice. The United States and other members of the international community, through joint

letters and in person, collectively pressed the Ministry of the Interior (MOI) to render justice for past human rights abuses.

In direct response to U.S. demarches, the Government re-opened and investigated stalled human rights abuse cases. The MOI reviewed the shortcomings of previous investigations and has launched additional, supervised investigations to bring the cases to closure. The MOI agreed to consider several murder cases from 2001 and 2002 in which police and officials of the former Government were implicated. By the end of 2004, two of these cases were satisfactorily closed, while a third was under investigation. On numerous occasions, the United States pressed the Government to hold accountable the perpetrators of the 2002 Rastanski Lozja incident, in which police in the former Government murdered seven South Asian itinerant workers and then portrayed them as terrorists. Constant pressure by the United States and other members of the international community stiffened the Government's resolve to bring the perpetrators to justice. In September, former Minister of Interior Boskovski, the suspected mastermind of the crime, was arrested in Croatia based on evidence submitted by the Macedonian authorities. He remains there awaiting trial. Another six former MOI officials were arrested in April in connection with the case. Trials for four of these suspects began in November and the remaining two suspects agreed to testify against their former MOI co-workers allegedly involved in the case.

In July, the U.S. Ambassador raised concerns with senior government officials about delays in serving ICTY summonses and stressed the need for the Government to ensure cooperation with the tribunal. Within a few weeks, bureaucratic bottlenecks had been removed and all summonses had been successfully delivered.

At the insistence of the U.S. Ambassador, the Minister of Defense changed the Border Brigade's Rules of Engagement to highly circumscribe the use of deadly force. Since then, no one has been killed while illegally crossing the Macedonian border.

During 2004, the United States hosted, co-organized, or participated in events to help Macedonia's judiciary attain EU standards. Significant achievements in 2004-2005 included amendments to the criminal code, an improved juvenile justice system, longer sentences for crimes against children, and an improved witness-protection law.

The U.S.-sponsored International Criminal Investigative Training Assistance Program (ICITAP) projects promoted a community policing model, encouraging

better protection of human rights and enhanced problem-solving cooperation between police and community leaders. As a result of ICITAP's activities, the Government has incorporated internationally-accepted community policing principles into the Code of Police Ethics of the Macedonian National Police. The success of a 2003 Community Policing pilot project in the city of Kavadarci prompted the MOI to request and the United States to launch a similar ICITAP project in the capital Skopje in 2004. The MOI has mandated that ICITAP's Community Policing Curriculum, which focuses on respect for human rights, be implemented nationwide and incorporated into police academy training.

In 2004, ICITAP also continued to provide guidance to the MOI's Professional Standards Unit (PSU), which enforces rules of conduct and conducts internal investigations. With ICITAP's assistance, the PSU continued to develop the capacity to carry out independent investigations and ensure consistent adherence to human rights principles. Based on ICITAP's recommendation, a new "criminal section" was established within the PSU to investigate cases of criminal misbehavior of law enforcement officials separately from cases of administrative/disciplinary misbehavior. Provisions for increased PSU transparency and enhanced cooperation with judicial authorities and the Ombudsman's office were also put in place.

Working together with the Macedonian police, ICITAP established the Citizens' Police Academy (CPA), the first institution of its kind in the Balkans. The Citizens' Police Academy educates citizens about the nature of police work, police practices and the new community policing model being adopted in Macedonia. By facilitating communication between police and citizens, the ICITAP-supported CPA builds trust, promotes transparency and improves government protection of human rights through increased respect for the rule of law. Collectively, U.S.-funded programs helped the Macedonian police to improve their respect for human rights significantly during 2004.

Putting previous U.S.-sponsored anti-organized crime training to use, government officials in 2004 began two trans-national TIP and money-laundering investigations involving current and former Government officials. The United States is providing expert assistance in the money-laundering investigation at the Government's request. The Southeast European Cooperation Initiative provided with U.S. funds technical assistance in support of customs and border control reform to help Macedonia fight corruption and customs crimes.

The United States awarded numerous small grants to local NGOs in support of projects promoting human rights. The U.S.-funded American Corner in Bitola,

Macedonia's second largest city, regularly hosted programs to increase public awareness of human and civil rights. A second American Corner opened in Skopje in January 2005, creating further opportunities for human rights and democracy-related outreach. The United States disseminated a wide variety of materials on human rights to key representatives of Macedonian media, NGOs, and others.

The United States promotes respect for the rights of women and minorities in several ways. The U.S. Embassy hosted its annual women's event and recognized 13 women for their contributions to Macedonian society through outstanding performance in their chosen professions. Throughout the year, U.S. officials participated in roundtable discussions organized by the Project on Ethnic Relations. This dialogue between the Government, political party leaders, international community representatives, NGOs and Roma leaders, resulted in the development of a government strategy to better address the needs of Macedonia's Roma community.

To promote religious freedom, U.S. officials regularly met with Macedonian religious groups and monitored religious freedom issues. The United States consistently encouraged the Government to protect religious freedom and to find an acceptable solution to the ongoing religious dispute between the Macedonian and Serbian Orthodox Churches and their respective clergy. In October 2004, the Ambassador hosted an Iftaar dinner for leaders of Macedonia's Islamic Community (MIC). He stressed the U.S. commitment to religious freedom and tolerance and encouraged the MIC to continue playing a constructive role in the run-up to the contentious and ethnically charged referendum. Shortly afterward, the MIC issued a statement reaffirming its support for the FWA and inter-ethnic cooperation. In November, the U.S. Ambassador pressed government officials to ensure fair treatment of a controversial Serbian Orthodox Church Bishop involved in a dispute with the Macedonian Orthodox Church. In December 2004, U.S. officials met with members of the Jewish Community of Macedonia to discuss their concerns regarding the stalled restitution of properties granted to the Jewish Holocaust Fund in Macedonia, and then highlighted these concerns in subsequent meetings with government officials. As of January 2005, sufficient property had been transferred to the Fund to enable construction of a Holocaust Memorial Center in the former Jewish quarter of Skopje.

In support of worker's rights, the United States funded a project to assist the 250,000-member Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia to improve membership services and provisions for ethnic minority members. The teachers' union once on the verge of splitting along ethnic lines has added over 8,000 new

members as a direct result of this support and developed into a group that advocates shared professional concerns that cross ethnic lines.

The United States aggressively promoted training, education and awareness initiatives to help combat Macedonia's TIP problem. The United States also hosted an ongoing series of training programs that enhanced collaboration among prosecutors, police and investigative judges, improved anti-trafficking prosecutorial and police techniques, and worked to ensure that trafficking victims' human rights were respected during police investigations. ICITAP facilitated a U.S. donation of vehicles and office equipment to the Anti-Trafficking Unit of the Macedonian National Police.

The United States conducted exchange and training programs to demonstrate how the United States handles the issue of trafficking. The American Corners in Skopje and Bitola have special sections devoted to human trafficking for public awareness and use. The United States also disbursed small grants to NGOs to raise public awareness about TIP. A U.S.-funded interim witness facilitation program began operating in 2004.

Another U.S. grant helped a local NGO that specializes in anti-trafficking activities to begin developing a national anti-trafficking database.